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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DAKAR 001400

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STATE FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, NEA/RA, DRL AND INR/AA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: LUNCH WITH ARAB AMBASSADORS TO SENEGAL

Classified By: Political Officer Osman N. Tat for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) On June 18, 2007, the Ambassador hosted a lunch with Arab Ambassadors. The frank discussion focused on democracy in the Middle East, terrorism and its root causes, Islamic parties, methodologies to win elections, the Palestinian question, and water issues as a potential spark for conflict. The Ambassadors underscored their peoples, friendship with the people of the United States but were quick to criticize the U.S. policy of meeting with Islamic and/or opposition leaders whom they believe want to topple their governments.
END SUMMARY.

DEMOCRACY

12. (S) Tunisian Ambassador Jalel Lakhdar (strictly protect), an extremely well spoken man with a rich vocabulary, a deep knowledge of the United States and strong views on democracy, opined that democracy was a boon to the Arab world but underlined that moderate voices are being both drowned out and threatened by fundamentalist forces. He feels that democracy is the only way to modernize the Arab world and rejects the dark and austere vision of a world rooted in the Seventh Century that fundamentalists are seeking to impose through terrorism and the ballot box. This viewpoint was supported by both Moroccan Ambassador Moha Ouali Tagma and Algerian Ambassador Abdelhamid Chebchoub. When outlining the reforms that King Mohammed VI had undertaken in Morocco, Tagma emphasized democratic ones especially in women's rights and fully agreed with Lakhdar that through democracy comes modernity.

13. (S) However, Tagma (strictly protect) offered &friendly8 advice as he criticized the U.S policy of meeting with Islamic parties, especially those that seek to replace the King with an Islamic Republic: &How can we take their democratic credentials seriously when they refuse to recognize the monarchy as a legitimate institution?8 He was particularly critical of any interaction with Sheikh Abdessalam Yacine, his daughter and the Justice and Charity Movement. He went on to say that whenever a U.S. representative meets with such groups it increases their credibility and legitimacy. This point received general support from the other ambassadors, as did his assertion that the United States preaches democracy but when a group like

Hamas gets elected into power the immediate reaction is surprise followed by scrambling to disenfranchise them from the process of governance.

A REJECTION OF TERRORISM

14. (C) All of the ambassadors agreed that terrorism was the nemesis of the Arab world and were derisive of the warped mentality of terrorists whose wish it is to return the whole region to the Seventh Century. Lakhdar stressed that Arab societies had to go through the painful process of self-criticism in order to understand why so many young people are driven to become, for example, suicide bombers. He said that such a process would be unusual in the Arab world but that for the sake of the future of their countries it was crucial. In reply, Lebanese Ambassador Michel Haddad agreed but maintained that self-criticism should not turn into self-flagellation. He also warned that the recent infighting between Hamas and Fattah and the de facto coup that Hamas staged was an extremely worrisome development, not only for Lebanon, which is already dealing with Hezbollah, but for countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia that have strong, resolute and vocal Islamic parties or terrorist organizations. While criticizing the Fatah leadership for doing absolutely nothing to defend its interests in Gaza, he said that Hamas, action could not be supported. Saudi Ambassador Shaye Al Khoshiban, who remained quiet throughout most of the lunch, especially during the discussion on democracy in the Arab world, nodded in agreement.

THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

15. (C) The Ambassadors were unified in the view that there would be no peace in the Middle East until the Palestinian

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question s resolved. The new Egyptian Ambassador, Mohamed Gamal Eldin Eleish, a recent arrival from Niger who has yet to present his credentials to PresidentWade, was particularly critical of Israel sayingthat none of the current crops of politicians cold be trusted. It must be noted that this is Elish,s first lunch with the U.S. and Arab Ambassadr s and it is likely that he chose safety in the tandard criticism of Israel to feel the crowd out efore opining on anything.

BUYING THE VOTERS

16. (C) Islamic political parties do a good job when elected, have a clean-cut non-corrupt image, plenty of financing and competent candidates. These are the reasons why, the ambassadors posited, they tend to do well in general elections throughout the Arab world. Algerian Ambassador Chebchoub described a typical electioneering strategy that Islamic leaning parties employ. They go into a neighborhood, identify a well known, pious and respected local figure, such as a doctor, and persuade him to run for parliament. Inevitably, that person is elected as the other parties usually tend to impose candidates from outside the community.

The Ambassadors described how prior to national elections in Morocco and Algeria, Islamic parties spend a lot of money in poor districts handing out basic necessities such as rice, flour, coal and gas tanks. Furthermore, mayors, municipal council chairmen and other local leaders associated with Islamic parties tend to build a reputation of getting the job done. Trash is picked up, neighborhoods get electricity and water, and seldom are these figures involved in scandal and corruption that tend to bring down many politicians from mainstream parties. Ambassador Tagma said that in Morocco, the Government is keenly aware of this problem and that the state is now trying to fill this &services8 void that the Islamic parties are so quick to exploit.

WATER -- NARY A DROP TO STOP A CONFLAGRATION

17. (C) Looking to the future the Ambassadors agreed that

large scale multinational conflicts could well be ignited due to water. According to Ambassador Haddad, desalinized water, which remains extremely expensive to produce, cannot be used for growing crops and thus the need to manage rivers and secure sources of water in an arid region whose population is booming will continue to be a major source of attrition between Arab states. Most of the region,s major rivers flow out of Turkey and that country,s influence will loom large. Ambassador Lakhdar then reminded the group that Israel and its need for water, especially from the Jordan River, will once again bring it into direct conflict with Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinians and Jordan.

PARTICIPANTS

18. (SBU) A list of participants follows:

United States:

Ambassador Jacobs
Claud Young, Counselor for Public Affairs
Oz Tat, Political Officer

Arab Guests:

Michel Haddad, Ambassador of Lebanon
Moha Ouali Tagma, Ambassador of Morocco
Jalel Lakhdar, Ambassador of Tunisia
Abdelhamid Chebchoub, Ambassador of Algeria
Dr. Shaye Al Khoshiban, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia
Mohamed Gamal Eldin Eleish, Ambassador of Egypt

19. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar,s SIPRNET Web site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>.
JACOBS